

SpaceX Falcon 9 Rocket Launches

Written by Larry Nelson

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Cape Canaveral, Florida (CNN) -- Friday's test launch of the Falcon 9 rocket was "essentially a bullseye," SpaceX officials said after the rocket successfully pushed past the earth's atmosphere and deposited a mock-up of its Dragon space capsule in orbit.

The successful launch is the latest step toward commercial space ventures that could eventually ferry astronauts and cargo to the international space station.

The capsule is expected to orbit for about a year and eventually burn up in the atmosphere.

NASA hopes companies such as SpaceX can take over transportation to the international space station.

NASA has been flying shuttles in low Earth orbit and going to and from the space station for 30

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years. The administration would like to see whether private companies can do it cheaper and more efficiently, as the shuttle program is about to fly into retirement.

NASA selected SpaceX and another company, Orbital Sciences, to each develop an orbital vehicle because the United States will not have its own way to get to the space station. The United States will be renting space from the Russians aboard their Soyuz spacecraft.